

# **Self-care tools: Coping with distress during a crisis**

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If you are experiencing stress, strong emotions, crisis  
or survival guilt you are not alone.

Right now, there are many other people in our  
community and all around the world who are also  
struggling with stress.

Let's learn how to do what matters in times of stress!

# Stress

Everyone experiences stress at times.

A little bit of stress is not a problem.

But very high stress often affects the body. Many people get unpleasant feelings.

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## Physiological Symptoms

- HEADACHES
- NECK AND SHOULDER PAIN
- BACK PAIN
- UPSET STOMACH
- NOT FEELING HUNGRY
- LUMP IN THE THROAT
- HEAVY CHEST
- TIGHT MUSCLES

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When they are stressed, many people ...

...cannot focus

...get angry easily

...cannot sit still

...have difficulty sleeping

...feel sad or guilty

...worry

...cry

...feel very tired

And many of us think a lot about bad things from the past or bad things we fear in the future.

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We are experiencing stress, distress  
because....

**We care....**

we genuinely care about being:

- Loving
- Wise
- Contributing
- Committed
- Persistent
- Responsible
- Protective
- Courageous

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## If values are good for us then...

- Why do we have difficult emotions?
- Why we don't know how to act on our values?
- Why it is hard to live a meaningful life?
- Why we think we are helpless?
- Why we're moving away from our values?

## Because it is “hard”

- H – Hooked by thoughts, emotions, images, memories and sensations
- A- Avoidance of discomfort
- R- Remoteness from Values
- D- (not) Doing what matters

## Getting unhooked

- By grounding
- By being present in the here and now
- By noticing our overt and covert world
- By being mindful

## Grounding techniques

- Through breathing (4-4-4 technique), (diaphragm breathing), (3-4-5 technique)
- Through 5 senses (5-4-3-2-1 technique), 1 sense at a time (perfume, snack, stress ball, flashlight...)
- Relaxation strategies (progressive muscle relaxation...)
- Noticing, slowing down and connecting
- STOP (Stop, take a step back, observe and proceed mindfully)

# ACE Strategy

- Acknowledge
- Connect
- Engage

## Tolerating distress

The ability to tolerate and accept distress is an essential mental health goal for at least two reasons:

First, pain and distress are part of life; they cannot be entirely avoided or removed. The inability to accept this immutable fact itself leads to increased pain and suffering.

Second, distress tolerance is part and parcel of any attempt to change oneself; otherwise, efforts to escape pain and distress (e.g., through impulsive actions) will interfere with efforts to establish desired changes.

# Stop skill

1. Stop: Do not just react. Stop! Freeze! Do not move a muscle! Your emotions may try to make you act without thinking. Stay in control! Take a step back Take a step back from the situation.
2. Take a break: Let go. Take a deep breath. Do not let your feelings make you act impulsively.
3. Observe: Notice what is going on inside and outside you. What is the situation? What are your thoughts and feelings? What are others saying or doing?
4. Proceed mindfully: Act with awareness. In deciding what to do, consider your thoughts and feelings, the situation, and other people's thoughts and feelings. Think about your goals. Ask Wise Mind: Which actions will make it better or worse?

## Distraction with:

- Activities
- Contributing
- Emotions
- Pushing away from the situation
- Thoughts
- Sensations

## TIPP Skill : changing your body chemistry

- Tip the Temperature of your face with cold water (to calm down fast)
- Intense exercise (to calm down your body when it is revved up by emotion)
- Paced breathing (pace your breathing by slowing it down)
- Paired muscle relaxation (to calm down by pairing muscle relaxation with breathing out)

## Improving the moment

- Imagery,
- Meaning,
- Prayer,
- Relaxing actions,
- One thing in the moment,
- Vacation, and
- Encouragement

# Simple Ways to Get Present

- *Take Ten Breaths*
- *Drop Anchor*
- *Notice Five Things*
- *Mindfulness in Your Morning Routine*
- *Mindfulness of Domestic activities*
- *Mindfulness of Pleasant Activities*

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## Discovering and doing what matters

- What are my values?
- Why it is important to live my values?
- How can I translate my values into actions?
- How can I live my values in the midst of this crisis?

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1. Family relations. What sort of brother/sister, son/daughter, uncle/auntie do you want to be? What personal qualities would you like to bring to those relationships? What sort of relationships would you like to build? How would you interact with others if you were the ideal you in these relationships?

2. Marriage/couples/intimate relations. What sort of partner would you like to be in an intimate relationship? What personal qualities would you like to develop? What sort of relationship would you like to build? How would you interact with your partner if you were the 'ideal you' in this relationship?

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3. Parenting. What sort of parent would you like to be? What sort of qualities would you like to have? What sort of relationships would you like to build with your children? How would you behave if you were the 'ideal you'.

4. Friendships/social life. What sort of qualities would you like to bring to your friendships? If you could be the best friend possible, how would you behave towards your friends? What sort of friendships would you like to build?

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5. Career/employment. What do you value in your work? What would make it more meaningful? What kind of worker would you like to be? If you were living up to your own ideal standards, what personal qualities would you like to bring to your work? What sort of work relations would you like to build?

6. Education/personal growth and development. What do you value about learning, education, training, or personal growth? What new skills would you like to learn? What knowledge would you like to gain? What further education appeals to you? What sort of student would you like to be? What personal qualities would you like to apply?

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7. Recreation/fun/leisure. What sorts of hobbies, sports, or leisure activities do you enjoy? How do you relax and unwind? How do you have fun? What sorts of activities would you like to do?

8. Spirituality. Whatever spirituality means to you is fine. It may be as simple as communing with nature, or as formal as participation in an organised religious group. What is important to you in this area of life?

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9. Citizenship/ environment/ community life. How would you like to contribute to your community or environment, e.g. through volunteering, or recycling, or supporting a group/ charity/ political party? What sort of environments would you like to create at home, and at work? What environments would you like to spend more time in?

10. Health/physical well-being. What are your values related to maintaining your physical well-being? How do you want to look after your health, with regard to sleep, diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol, etc? Why is this important?

## Goal Setting during crisis

- Look out for the meaning (why do I want to do this....)
- What are my values?
- Respecting my limits, my humanity, my emotions...
- Planning something small as a start
- Be realistic

## Activity scheduling

- Planning your next day ahead
- Variety of activities
- Check on your beloved ones
- Increase your level of pleasure and mastery
- Create a routine

## Self-compassion and survivor guilt

1. Acknowledging pain,
2. Validating pain,
3. Accepting pain,
4. Defusion from harsh self-criticism,
5. Self-kindness in thought, word and action,
6. Connectedness with others.

## Values and shame

- How would you treat, and/or what advice would you give to a loved one who had been through similar events and felt the same way as you do?
- What does this shame tell you really matters to you? That you need to address, face up to, take action on?
- What does shame remind you about the way you ideally want to treat yourself/ treat others?
- What does shame tell you that: you've lost/ you need to be careful about/ you want to stand up for/ you deeply care about/ you need to deal with?
- What does shame tell you about the way you'd like the world/yourself/ others/life to be?

## Remember

You are doing your best **AND**  
you can do better